

ST. LUKE GUIDE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN BERTIE COUNTY



The Gospel Oak

HISTORIC AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES IN BERTIE COUNTY

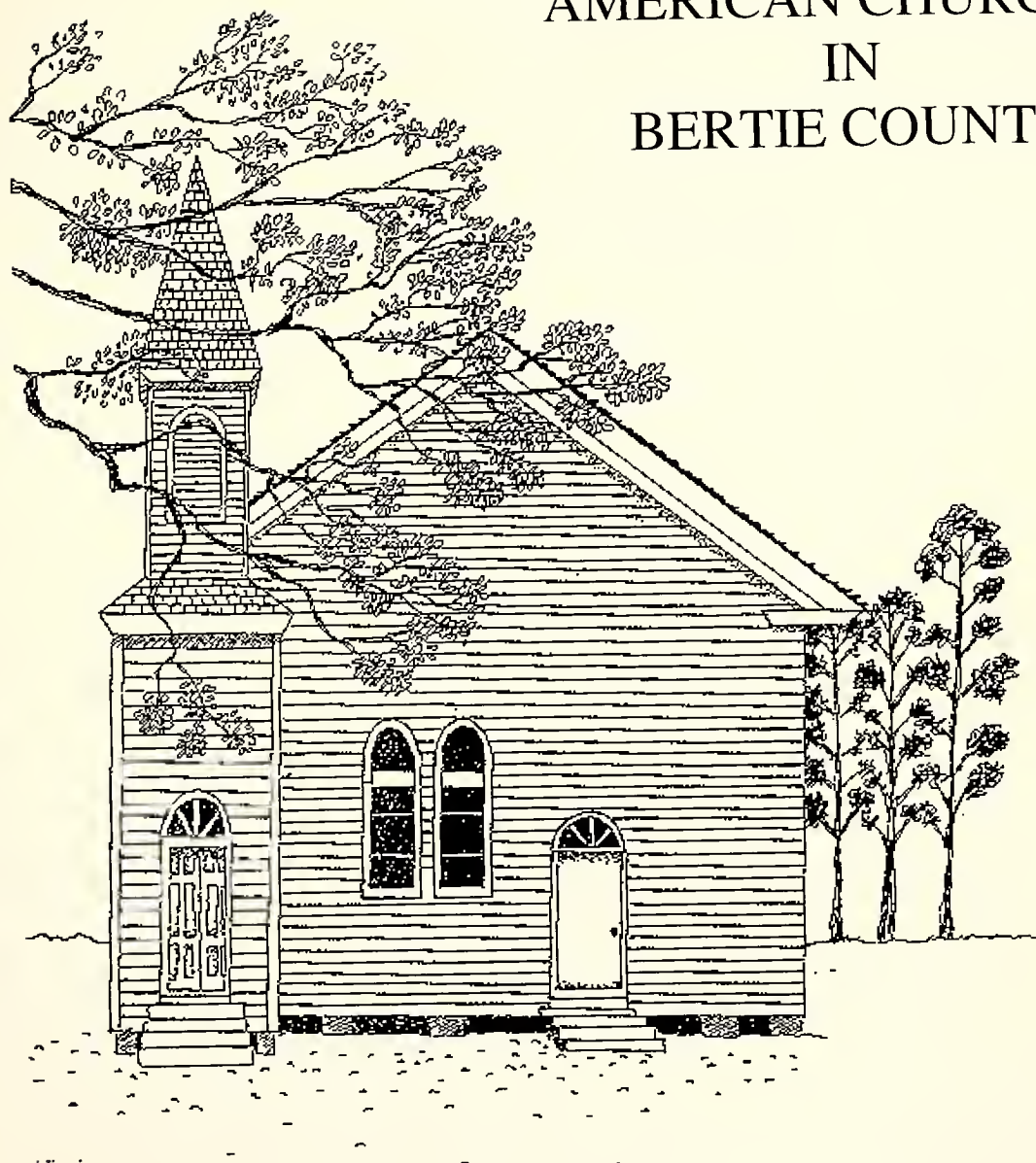
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This guide is the first in an occasional publication series to be supported by the St. Luke Credit Union. The St. Luke Credit Union, Windsor, North Carolina, was formed in 1944 by some black sharecroppers in rural Bertie County as a “self-help” lending organization. Since its founding, the St. Luke Credit Union has been persistent in fulfilling perceived community needs.

Cover Illustration

The big oak tree on the cover of this guide is the most talked about landmark of the Albemarle District of North Carolina. The old tree is commonly called “The Gospel Oak”. “The Gospel Oak” received its name from the fact that after the Civil War newly emancipated African Americans held church service for many years under its wide-spreading boughs. As early as 1712, this oak tree was notable for its size and was the meeting place for the community. The area under the tree is large enough to seat easily two hundred persons.

HISTORIC AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES IN BERTIE COUNTY



St. Luke Guide to African American History in Bertie County

This publication is made possible through funding from the North Carolina Humanities Council.
This non-profit foundation, funded by federal tax dollars and private contributions, has as its mission to promote public programs and encourage citizens to examine, discuss and reflect on their histories, traditions, and cultures, and on their place in the local and global worlds that they help make and sustain.

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Historic African American Churches in Bertie County

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THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The religious life of the majority of black southerners originated in both traditional African religion and in Anglo-Protestant Evangelicalism. Enslaved Africans in the South transmitted to their descendants styles of worship, funeral customs, magical rituals, and medicinal practice based upon the religious system of West and Central African societies.

During the eighteenth century, slaves were attracted to evangelical revivals due to several factors: the emotional behavior of the revivalists encouraged the type of ecstasy similar to the danced religions of Africa; the antislavery stance taken by some Baptists and Methodists encouraged slaves to identify Evangelicalism with emancipation; blacks actively participated in evangelical meetings and co-founded churches with white evangelicals; and, evangelical churches licensed black men to preach.

By 1780 pioneer black preachers had already begun to minister to their own people in the South, and as time went on black congregations, mainly Baptist in denomination, increased in size and number, despite occasional harassment and proscription by the authorities. However, the majority of slaves in the antebellum South attended church, if at all, with whites.

Institutional church life did not exhaust the religion of the slaves. An "invisible institution" of secret and often forbidden religious meetings thrived in the slave quarters. Here slaves countered the slave holding gospel of the master class with their own version of Christianity in which slavery and slave holding stood condemned by God. Slaves took the biblical story of Exodus and applied it to their own history, asserting that they, like the children of Israel, would be liberated from bondage. In the experience of conversion, individual slaves affirmed their personal dignity and self-worth. In the ministry, black men exercised authority and achieved status nowhere else available to them. Melding African and Western European traditions, the slaves created a religion of great vitality.

The Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction wrought an institutional transformation of black churches in the South. Northern denominations -- black as well as white -- sent aid to the freedmen and missionaries to educate and bring them to church. Freedmen, eager to learn to read and write, rushed to schools set up by the American Missionary Association and other freedmen's aid societies. These freedmen's schools laid the foundation for black colleges and universities such as Shaw (Baptist), St. Augustine's (Episcopal), Livingstone (African Methodist Episcopal Zion), Bennett (Methodist Episcopal), Barber-Scotia (Presbyterian) and Johnson C. Smith (Presbyterian). Eager to exercise autonomy, freedmen deserted white churches and organized their own.

Black ministers actively campaigned in Reconstruction politics and in some cases were elected to positions of influence and power. With the failure of Reconstruction and the disfranchisement of black southerners, the church once again became the sole forum for black politics, as well as the economic, social, and educational center of black communities across the state.

By the end of the century, black church membership stood at an astounding 2.7 million out of a population of 8.3 million. Most numerous were the Baptists who succeeded in 1895 in creating a National Baptist Convention. Second numerically were the black Methodists, as institutionalized in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, both founded in the North early in the century, and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, formed by an amicable withdrawal from the Southern Methodist Church, in 1870.

Although too poor to mount a full-fledged missionary campaign, the black churches turned to evangelization of Africans as a challenge to Afro-American Christian identity. In the 1870s and 1880s the mission to Africans seemed all the more urgent as race relations worsened, as lynching mounted in frequency, as racism was legislated in Jim Crow statutes, some black church members viewed emigration as their only hope. Others saw the redemption of Africa as

the divinely appointed destiny of black Americans, God's plan for drawing good out of the evil of slavery and oppression.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement drew heavily upon the institutional and ethical resources of the black churches across the South. The civil rights movement brought to the attention of the nation the moral tradition of black religion. Although the church in larger society is no longer the only institution under black control, it still exerts considerable power in black communities.

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HISTORIC AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCHES IN BERTIE COUNTY

Historical Background

African Americans have always been a significant part of religious life in Bertie County. The Baptist and Methodist have been the dominant religious denominations in Bertie County. Before the Civil War, religion appealed to slaves as a means of socializing, maintaining their cultural identity, and coping with their enslavement. Blacks not only organized their own religious groups but sometimes participated in the meetings of whites, particularly the Baptists. As early as 1773 the black members of Sandy Run Baptist Church had their own black preachers and were holding their own services. Because of the autonomy of the Baptist denominations and pre-civil war associations with the Baptists, several Black Baptist churches were formed during the early emancipation era (1865) in Bertie County.

Historically, African Americans have constituted more than 50 percent of the Baptists, and 40 percent of the Methodists, with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church representing the largest Methodist denomination. Currently, the African American Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Pentecostal Holiness, Assembly of God, and Roman Catholic churches hold services in the county.

Historically, Black community life has been centered in the churches. Community organizations and groups that have organized to promote individual character and economic progress functioned out of the Black churches. Artisans, businessmen and professionals learned to identify and work together to form important businesses and sources of employment. One of the Black church's most significant roles has been the development and nurturing of civic leadership in the community. The Black church has had an especially important role in enhancing elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational opportunities for its youth, for example, scholarship funds for education of church members and the Cedar Landing Missionary Baptist Church's Youth Forum [Crow, Jeffrey J. and others. A History of African Americans in

North Carolina. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1992; and Watson, Alan D. Bertie County: A Brief History. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1982].

Purpose of the Guide

This guide is organized to provide the framework for students to gain a personal understanding of the historical forces that have had a significant impact on building the local community. One of the major historical forces in the Bertie County community has been the African American church. The issues that guide discussion sessions for learners are based on the North Carolina Humanities Council's (NCHC) "Democratic Vistas" series that focuses on communities and citizenship in the twenty-first century. This guide focuses on the African American church to ascertain its role through examination of the following questions:

1. What were the main reasons for the birth of the African American Church?
2. What role did the African American church have in the education, political and economic betterment of the community?
3. Can the African American church focus all of its resources on removing the dysfunctional elements in the community?

Competency goals for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Social Studies Curriculum for grade eight North Carolina History serve as the learning framework for this guide. The learner will access the influence of geography on the economic, social, and political development of Bertie County by:

1. determining the absolute and relative location and the physical and cultural features of the African American churches,
2. describing the physical and cultural aspects of the churches,
3. tracing the changes in the movement of people and ideas at different periods throughout the history of the churches,

4. and, assessing the importance of these churches on the development of economic, social and political institutions in the county.

This guide would not have been possible without the research, editorial assistance, and insightful suggestions provided by the following Bertie County citizens:

Willie Garrett Bazemore, Nurse

Clara Bond Bell, Social Worker Retired

Ollie P. Bond, School Librarian Retired

Dorothy Garrison Cherry, School Teacher Retired

Kathryn C. Epps, School Teacher Retired (New Jersey)

Estelle H. Simons, School Teacher Retired

John Tyler, President Emeritus, Historic Hope Foundation

A special thanks you to Christ Umfleet, Windsor Chamber of Commerce, for providing photographs of some of the churches.

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Ashland Missionary Baptist Church

Merry Hill



The Ashland Missionary Baptist Church was formed in 1875 and has, throughout its existence worked to provide members of its community with spiritual and physical well being. A one-story brick building serves as the sanctuary for the church and has an attached fellowship hall. Reverends J.L.S. Holloman, D.L. Simons, and James Sills, along with the founding members of the church established a base on which current members and pastors could build their current community outreach programs. Early members of the church were: Allen Cobb, Pearlle Cobb, Gus Gaskins, Lust Gaskins, Plummer Gaskin, Frank Gaskins, Lee Holley, Frank Holley,

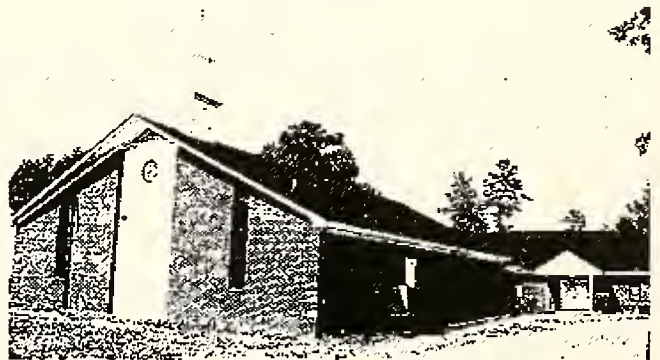
John Holley, John Leary, and Thaddues Morris.

The strong community emphasis of this church is evident in its many programs designed to benefit the young and old alike. The church has a membership of 500 and provides financial aid to sick and elderly in the community. Church members support political advocacy and voter registration. Additionally, the church provides funding to the local rescue squad. A bus provides transportation to church services and activities for children. Also, they have purchased some adjoining property so that the buildings and grounds could be used for the benefit of the community for sewing and quilting sessions and for birthday parties.

Aulander First Baptist Church

Aulander

The Aulander First Baptist Church was founded in 1893 with Reverend W.D. Early as its first pastor. The original property belonging to the church was purchased in 1919 by two deacons, Levi Melton and Charlie Bazemore. This property in the area known as Bloodfield was the site of the first church, a wooden frame structure. Early members of the church included Charlie Sharpe, Jackson Mitchell, Anson Boone, Charlie Moore, A.R. Winborne, James Sills, J.E. James, and C.A. Ebron.



Sometime after the Bloodfield property was purchased, the frame church was torn down and the wood used to construct another church on Commerce Street where the church has

remained. This one room wooden building was painted white and served as home for the congregation through several renovations and changes, including the additions of a fellowship hall and baptismal pool. In 1992, the 120-member congregation began construction of a new sanctuary to replace the frame structure that was beyond repair. The new brick church was dedicated in 1994.

Throughout its history, the congregation of the Aulander First Baptist Church has worked within its community to provide for the needs of its citizens spiritually and physically. The fellowship hall and ballpark behind the church served as centers of the community where members could meet, fellowship, and work to help each other. The church also sponsors a pantry, which provides food to hungry families both inside and outside the Aulander community.

As a symbol of the hard-working determination of the members of Aulander First Baptist Church, the new sanctuary was designed and constructed by its membership led by brothers Linwood and William Melton.

"The Church Where Everybody is Somebody and Christ is the Head."

Bazemore Temple Church of God in Christ Windsor



Acknowledged as being the first Church of God in Christ founded in North Carolina, the Bazemore Temple C.O.G.I.C. has interesting but spiritual beginnings. The first congregational meetings of what would become Bazemore Temple took place in the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Jack Bazemore in the Chowatic Pocosin Section of Bertie County. As news spread of the teaching and learning in the Bazemore home, many from around the community began to participate. Aaron Bazemore, around 1911, began to serve as the pastor of the group and the congregation soon became too large for any of the local houses. The congregation then began to fast and pray that they would find the land on which to build a church.

Some of these early members who were so dedicated to their church were: Jefferson Bazemore, Edward Speller, Waverly Winborne, James M. Ryan, Jay Fare Cherry, Frank Parker, Hill Parker, James M. Ruffin, Sr., Arthur Gilliam, Charlotte Bazemore, Ester Bazemore, Tulie B. Furrin, Ollie O. Bazemore, Sophia Rascoe, Ida Pugh, Viginia Cherry, Virginia Parker, Nettie Eppes, Bettie Bazemore, and Maggie Gilliam.

In 1918, Pastor Bazemore and the congregation were able to purchase a tract of land for \$300.00 from Mr. and Mrs. W.S. Outlaw. The church was named St. John Church of God in Christ. A small church building was constructed in 1920 on the land and was the home of many services in which the number of churchgoers far outnumbered the available seats. As a result, the church was enlarged on its lot and the name changed to Cedar Fork C.O.G.I.C. because of the many cedar trees in the area. Church members were baptized near Hoggard's Mill during this period.

The church building has since been enlarged twice and bricked. In 1980, because of his

dedication to the church and his constant support, the congregation re-named the church Bazemore Temple Church of God in Christ in honor of Aaron Bazemore. Father Bazemore died in 1992 at the age of one hundred and eleven.

Cedar Landing Missionary Baptist Church Cedar Landing

Cedar Landing has been the home of worship for men and women of the community since 1866 when a group of men began worshipping in freight warehouse on the banks of the Roanoke. The area was called Cedar Landing because of the grove of cedar trees nearby. A building was constructed later quite near this original worship spot. The first pastor at this time was Reverend Abram Mebane of Edenton who remained with the church until 1876. The first members of the church were Solomon Carter, Andrew Outlaw, Peter Williams, Alfred Speller, Reuben Allen, Sam Thompson, Thomas Will Mooring, Ben Gray and Musca Sutton. Joseph Collins served as the first church clerk.

The congregation of Cedar Landing has grown continuously since those early days and has been the parent church for several others in the community. Peterson Grove Baptist Church was formed out of the membership of Cedar Landing around the turn of the century. And, around 1903, several members left and joined to worship in what is now known as Speller's Chapel Church.



In 1910, a new church building was constructed which was destroyed by fire. The current church building was opened for its first worship service in 1978. An annex has been added with multi-purpose rooms for the use of the congregation. The members of the church acknowledge that the church and its people provide the knowledge and inspiration necessary to confront the challenges of the world.

Cedar Landing Missionary Baptist Church has traditionally helped to build and maintain the family and the civic, economic, and spiritual infrastructure of the community. Through programs such as the Cedar Landing Youth Forum, Political Action Ministry, and the Helping Hands Ministry the church has been successful in its goals. The weekly Youth Forum, founded by Kertrina Watson serves as an outreach ministry to expose local youth to aesthetics, from etiquette to music while sponsoring visits from local community leaders to the church and career fairs. The Political Action Ministry encourages members to become active participants in community affairs. Another ministry, the E.C. Watson Memorial Library, serves the local community through children's story hours, loans sermons on tape to community members, and donates books to children for Christmas. The Helping Hands program offers comfort and financial support for the sick and shut-ins, financially distressed families and offers devotionals at the Mary Alice Adult Day Care Center.

First Baptist Church of Kelford Kelford



Formed in 1893, the man credited as the founder for the First Baptist Church of Kelford is Mr. Richard Biggs. The current church structure covers approximately 3,000 square feet and has a fellowship hall. Reverends King Jacobs, A.J. Boney, C.P. Ivory, A.R. Smith, John Whitfield Law, Claude M. Odom, and Jerry V. Moody have all served the church faithfully.

The church sees that care for the youth and elderly in the community is one of its main goals and, as a result works to provide assistance to those people. The church congregation of 125 provides monetary support to many, including Shaw University, the West Roanoke Union, and the West Roanoke Baptist Association. The church provides students with scholarships and donates to Bertie High School's Project Graduation.

Indian Woods Missionary Baptist Church Indian Woods

The Indian Woods congregation traces its beginnings to worship services held under the Gospel Oak Tree soon after emancipation. In 1876 a group of these worshipers began meeting with their first pastor, Reverend Abrom Meban, in what became known as Indian Woods Chapel. On January 1, 1877, the congregation purchased the chapel and land, establishing the Indian Woods Baptist Church. The second pastor, Reverend Thaddeus Wilson soon began to preach at the church as well as preaching at the Gospel Oak, where many still gathered to worship. The first leaders of the church were Baptist Terpin, Valder Bond, Moses Gilliam, Robbin Smallwood, Cary Speller and Isaac Bond.



Later in the church's history, under the leadership of its third pastor, Reverend J.J. "Black Horse" Thompson, the first building program was begun which resulted in a wooden frame building with a gallery. Many present day members of the congregation still remember that building as the "old church." In 1955, a groundbreaking ceremony was held so that a newer, larger sanctuary could be constructed to accommodate the growing numbers of members in the congregation. The new building was completed in 1961 and currently serves the needs of the congregation.

The church congregation works in numerous ways to help the members of its community. It has been recorded that while Reverend C.M. Creecy served as pastor during the ambitious building campaign of the 1950's, the new church was seen as a place where emphasis could be placed on the pride in the appearance of the church building and, therefore, how the church represented the homes in the community. Additionally, the church offers scholarships to its young college students, and, importantly, sponsors a Junior Men's League. The Johnnie J. Etheridge Junior Men's League was formed by the church with an educational purpose -- to develop and conduct programs designed to spiritually, socially, and educationally uplift the young within the church and surrounding community. As the men of the church carry out this goal, they serve as positive male role models for the youth of the community. Their projects include visiting prisons, providing transportation to and from church and participation in educational and recreational outings with community youth.

Luella Baptist Church Kelford

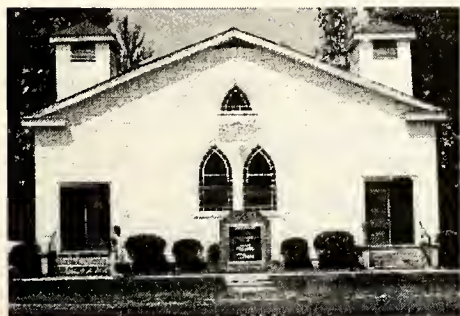


The Reverend Bryant Lee and several members including Noah Powell, Joshua Lee and Joseph Powell founded Luella Baptist Church in 1884. The current church building is a wooden structure that was rebuilt in 1923 under the pastorship of Reverend A. J. Boney. The building has since had several additions and renovations.

The church began community outreach programs with Reverend John H. Bazemore, Sr., who started the Vacation Bible School program at the church. Many dedicated pastors have served the church and Reverend Bazemore was one of the most active pastors — he painted the entire church, inside and out, by himself during his pastorship.

The church currently offers support to the local community and aids in the care of the sick and elderly. In an effort to ensure the safety and education of local students, the church helps to sponsor Project Graduation at the high school and offers monetary support to Shaw University.

Mount Ararat Baptist Church Windsor



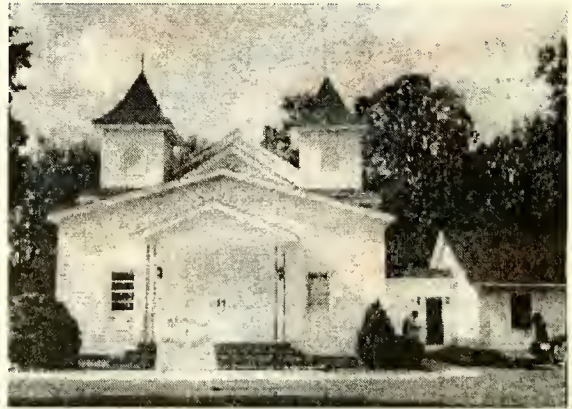
Solomon Lee Askew donated the land on which Mt. Ararat Church now sits to the church. The congregation, first formed in 1883, was led by deacons Starkey Hendricks, John "Carolina" Bazemore, and Joe Raleigh Cherry, the first clerk. Early pastors for the church included the Reverends Lafayette Sharpe, Dennie Simons and Tynee. The current building is home to a congregation of 200 and is brick with a large sanctuary, fellowship hall and

classrooms. An earlier structure, which sat behind the current church, was a frame building with arched stained glass windows.

The church stresses the importance of the youth in the community and offers outreach programs to families experiencing financial hardship. The congregation eagerly contributes money and time in providing assistance to charitable, school, and civic organizations.

Mount Herman Baptist Church Aulander

In January 1894, William J. Burden, Cary Speller, and Andrew Lee purchased land to establish Mt. Herman Baptist Church. The church organized by these and other early pioneers saw a need for a church in the Republican area of Bertie County and worked to establish a place of worship. Some of the members of the first congregation were Charlie Sharpe, Joe Armstrong, George Owens, Edward Parker, and I.V. Brinkley. In 1945 the church building was destroyed by fire but the congregation worked together to construct the present structure.



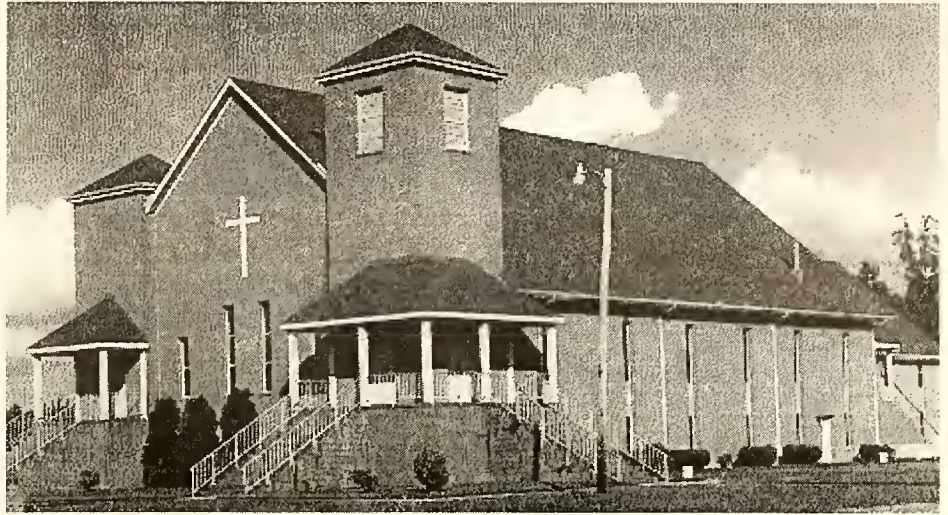
Some of the early projects of the church include the first Vacation Bible School, begun under the pastorate of Rev. John H. Bazemore. In 1984, when Reverend Robert Sessoms was appointed pastor, Sunday School services were re-established, services were expanded to two a month, a community choir was organized, the church building was renovated and a fellowship hall added.

The church continues to move forward in its community involvement, adding to its facilities and providing the community with regular Bible Studies and programs. The congregation regularly donates funds to local rest homes, Bertie High School, and needy members of the community.

Mount Olive Baptist Church Lewiston

Mount Olive Church members can trace their church's beginnings back to 1865 and to worship services held in a bush harbor led by Reverend Bryant Lee. Reverend Lee, born a slave, received his first religious instruction at Connaritsa Baptist Church, a white institution. This first congregation consisted of approximately 60 members who had previously attended Connaritsa and Republican Baptist Churches. In 1886 land was purchased near the bush harbor to construct the first church building.

Because the congregation grew with time, several changes have taken place to the church building over the years. The first brick church structure was begun in 1927 under the pastorship of Reverend W.S. Creecy. The current building was renovated in 1974 and 1975 under the guidance of the African American architectural firm, Rufus



B. Hux and Sons of Rocky Mount, who served as both architect and general contractor. The last renovations added educational classrooms and offices to the building for multi-functional purposes.

The church has been fortunate to be home to many excellent pastors and talented congregation members. The founding pastor, Reverend Lee, worked to protect the black community in their newfound freedom and through the church he worked to provide homes to orphaned children and jobs to the congregation at his cotton gin. The focus for Reverend Thomas Sharp was that of his devotion to the creation of strong family units within the community and encouraging strong bonds of love, respect, and protection within the family. Reverend Creecy, during the first part of this century, encouraged his parishioners to follow educational pursuits, including college attendance. In order to support his educational views, Reverend Creecy built a school and allowed students to attend regardless of their ability to pay for their education.

Several other ministers served their congregation faithfully with innovative community outreach programs. Reverend C.E. Griffin sought to help his congregation reach financial independence and worked with many through the Federal Government to acquire Farm Home Loans to purchase homes. Reverend Griffin also began many community programs to honor local students and adults, collegiate scholarship programs, Vacation Bible School was begun as well as other community outreach projects. Reverend George Brown worked to create the first church sponsored Kindergarten for community children. Reverend Stanley Petteway was politically active and encouraged the congregation to participate in local politics as he worked to break down the walls of segregation in the county schools. Reverend Petteway established a kindergarten program for all children from low-income households. The current thrust of the church is to offer a outreach program to the local community including spiritual, moral, physical, emotional and financial support. Reverend William L. Davis, Jr., sees counseling and cooperation within the church as a means to work with youth, young married couples, and others to unify the church into one body of love and cooperation.

Peterson Chapel Missionary Baptist Church

Merry Hill

Peterson Chapel can trace its earliest membership to just after the Civil War in 1865. The present church structure is brick with an attached fellowship hall. The earliest members and ministers of note were Reverend Thadious Wilson, pastor Mark Law, James Bolden, Richard Williams and Alfred Franks.

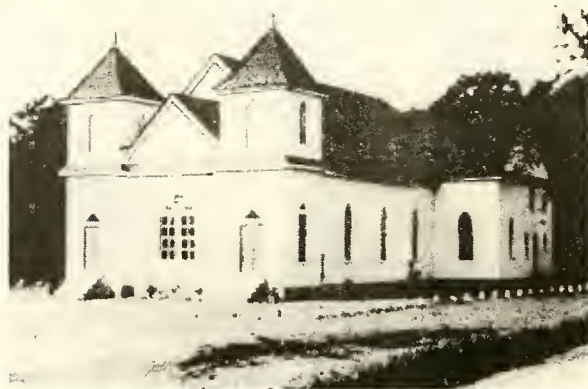
The church's community emphasis is reflected by its contributions to local civic organizations, including the YMCA, rescue squads, the American Heart Association and to the Bertie County Cancer Fund. The church also helps the local schools through the Bertie Senior Project. "The church reaches out to everyone in the community no race or creed, but to all people."

"We are the church by the side of the road -- where everyone is somebody and Christ is the Head Body"



Piney Wood Chapel Baptist Church

Windsor



Piney Wood Chapel officially began to offer services to its members in 1870. The first congregation of freed slaves to worship at Piney Grove had first been members of a white church, Holly Grove Baptist Church. Reverend Emmanuel Reynolds, a free slave, worked tirelessly to establish Piney Wood Chapel and seven other churches in the area.

The land for Piney Wood Chapel was donated by slaveowner Walt Mitchell after seeing the congregation gathered for prayer service in a bush shelter. A wooden church structure was

constructed by members of the congregation and was renovated several times. The church congregation continued to increase in size and by 1894, there were 263 members on the roster.

Some of the earliest ministers worked to instill pride in the church and community for their congregation and Reverend Charles Lewter was one such pastor. Reverend Lewter served the church as pastor from 1910 to 1915 and stressed the importance of land ownership for his flock. His successor, Reverend D.L. Simons, Sr., stressed spiritual and educational training in the home, church and community. Reverend W.S. Creecy was an influential pastor who encouraged members to educate their children and send them to college. As part of his dedication to education, he founded a private school for blacks now known as W.S. Creecy School in Rich Square. Reverend Creecy's legacy to Piney Woods was the inspiration for

members in areas of education, home ownership, business progress, and political advancement. Reverend W.H. Trotman was instrumental in the creation of a new church building for the congregation and the first service in the new church was held in 1975. Reverend W.R. Burston saw the usefulness the church could have in the community and worked to create a food and clothing ministry for the needy.

Currently, Piney Wood Chapel sponsors many community-based programs, including a Tutorial Program for students, regardless of membership in the church. The program began in 1993 with eight tutors and approximately 30 students. Workshops on parenting skills and self-esteem are also a part of the Tutorial Program. Piney Wood also established a scholarship program in 1991 to recognize outstanding students both in high school and college and reward them for their hard work.

"Our past is a prologue to the many accomplishments yet to be achieved, but we are motivated to continue to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."



Refreshing Center Church of God in Christ Windsor

A relatively young church in Bertie County, Refreshing Center was formed in 1965 and stresses that the church must take its ministry beyond the walls of the church building and into the community. Current plans include a street ministry and visits to local rest homes.

The late Bishop Herbert Lee Purkett built the cross-shaped stone church. An inspiration to his congregation and community, Bishop Purkett fell off the roof while building the church and was severely injured and was told he would never walk again. However, just a few months after the fall, Bishop Purkett returned to work and completed the church.

Candis Wilson, Clotie Gilliam, Bertha Cooper, Beatrice Harrell, Umstead Hoggard, Earnestine Holley, Sandy Freeman, John Swain, and Susie Virginia Ward Purkett have all been recognized as important members of the church.

"If they won't come to church, then its up to us to take the church to them... wherever it might be."



Saint Elmo Baptist Church

Windsor

Founded in 1887 on property donated by Judge F.D. Winston for a church, Saint Elmo has been an asset to its community. Judge Winston named the street and church for Saint Elmo's Fire, a natural phenomenon of light discharged in the atmosphere, since he anticipated that Saint Elmo would be a light in Windsor and the surrounding areas.

As a part of its challenge to enlighten the community, Saint Elmo has been home to many important members of the African-American community who served their church and community in educational, political, and financial aspects. For example, Mr. James T. Mountain worked with Saint Luke Credit Union, an African-American banking institution, Dr. Rachel A. Boyce was an educator and supervisor for Bertie County Schools, and Mr. Whitted Bond was a school principal.

Community involvement has been key to the congregation and has resulted in the creation of several long-standing traditions within the church. Saint Elmo developed the first Church Basketball Youth League that has become an important feature of many churches. Additionally, a Youth Forum was established in the 1950's. Youth from throughout Bertie County would meet at the church for Biblical and social instruction.

The church is currently focused on an outreach ministry to touch the lives of the community immediately surrounding the church. The main thrust of the ministry is to get families into the church on a regular basis so that a relationship can develop that will allow the community to open itself to the assistance the church can give through spiritual, physical, educational, economical, and moral support.



Saint Francis Missionary Baptist Church Windsor



Saint Francis Baptist Church was formed in 1887 and members of the congregation met in the home of Mrs. Frances Ryan for prayer services until the church was constructed. Because of her generosity, the community, church and school were named in Mrs. Ryan's honor. The land the church was built on was purchased from James and Sallie Bond. The trustees for Saint Francis were Joseph Bond, Jack Hill, Isham Dean, and Daniel Cooper.

The current church building is brick with a large sanctuary accompanied by several smaller rooms and a fellowship hall. The modern brick church replaced an earlier wooden church. Within the church, outreach programs are offered to the youth of the community.

Important members and ministers of the church are: the Reverends L.D. Speller, Lewis Outlaw, Pete Ryan, John W. White, John Bazemore, Brady Carmack and members Willie M. Bond, Willie T. Bond, Dalphus Bryant, Thomas S. Bond, Alexander Bond, Isolena Bond, Aaron Speller, Nepton Bond, Sr., and Annie Jones.

Saint Luke Missionary Baptist Church Sans Souci



Formed in 1893, Saint Luke has been an important entity in the lives of African Americans throughout Bertie County. Saint Luke currently boasts a membership of 108, housed in a recently constructed church. Prior to 1893, members of what would become Saint Luke Church worshiped at a place that was known as the "R.J. Shield Track." It was when the church moved from this location to its present site just north that Saint Luke was truly organized under the leadership of Reverend

Armstead Cooper, the first pastor, and Reverend Charles Bullock with Deacons Henry Cooper, Arthur Sutton, John D. Holley, and George Holley.

The current church was completed in 1996 to replace the older wooden church that had housed the congregation since 1900. The church began to serve as the roots of the community early in its existence and gave its name to the community, the local school and a bank created by its membership. As an example of its dedication to the education of the members of the community, Pastor John W. White and member James T. Mountain served as principals of the newly formed school.

Of the many churches in the county that contribute to the welfare of their congregations as well as to the general public, Saint Luke's lasting contribution will be the establishment of Saint Luke's Credit Union in Windsor. The Credit Union grew out of a need within the African-American community for financial assistance to economically distressed members of Bertie and surrounding counties. The founding members of Saint Luke's Credit Union met in the church, and later the school, to create the foundation. Some of these men were Martin Clemmons, James T. Mountain, David L. Sutton, Phillip Webb, Sampson Simmons, and William Cooper who was the first Secretary/Treasurer for the Credit Union.

Other civic contributions of the church include the support of a local 4-H group, St. Luke Home Demonstration club, and the creation of St. Luke Baseball and Basketball teams. Additionally, Saint Luke's members have formed a Community Prayer Band and a Community Food Distribution Program.

"To God Be the Glory"

Saint Matthews Baptist Church Windsor



As with many churches in Bertie County, Saint Matthews cannot pinpoint the first meeting of the souls that would later form the first church, however, it is known that in 1877, men and women in the Rice Mills community began to worship under the leadership of Reverend Luke Pierce and organized Saint Matthews Church.

The first deacons of the church were D. Overton, C. Cherry, D.C. Bond, A. Rice and H. Vaughan. The first members of the congregation were Janie Rice, Winnie Bunch, Martha Ann White, Vina Vaughan, Rita Cherry, Hanna Askew, and

Jordan Cherry.

Throughout its history, Saint Matthews has been served faithfully by several pastors: Luke Pierce, J.F. Bryant, Wade Owens, I.B. Brinkley, Charley Luter, D.L. Simons, Herbert Jenkins, J.K. Ramsay, Wright Moore and West Early. Some of the earliest deacons were A. Rice, Dorsey White, Jordan Cherry, H. Vaughan, Askew Eason, Wright Wynns, Monroe Rice, William Williford, Alfred Rice, David Overton, Thomas Askew, Robert Bunch, Granville Cherry, S.H. Overton, Oris Rice, John Edd Harmon, Clinton Rice.

Saint Paul Missionary Baptist Church Windsor



Formed in 1909 and located on Woodard Road, Saint Paul Baptist Church owes much of its early history and founding to its ministers and members. The church actively participates in its community and serves as a home of worship for many in the area. Madison Smithwick and his wife are considered to be the most important of the earliest founding members of the church.

Unfortunately, a fire destroyed most of the heritage of the church. The current church structure is brick with a fellowship hall, kitchen and offices. The church is presently home to a membership of 175.

Sandy Branch Missionary Baptist Church Roxobel

The congregation for Sandy Branch first began to meet in a natural environment under a bush arbor in Roxobel before 1871 although it is known that some of the early members of the church worshipped together in their homes as slaves. The earliest records of the church show that in 1871 deacons Abram Dowden, Jacob Bishop and Jackson Hardy purchased an acre of land for Sandy Branch Baptist Church from Joe and Lucy E. Hardy for ten dollars.

The church records show that in the 1880's much work was being done to construct a church building. In 1890 additional land was purchased for the church. The original church was described as being 30 feet by 30 feet by 14 feet with two doors in front, four large windows on each side and two windows at the rear of the church.

Early ministers for the church were Reverends George Brown (1871-1887), Luke Pierce (1887-1893), George White (1893-1898), and Armstead Cooper (1898-1918). In the 1950's, the church was bricked, electricity added, and a baptismal pool introduced. In 1979, under the pastorship of Reverend Peter Holland, a new church was constructed and completed in 1980. Reverend Lycurgus Harrell has served the church since 1979 as pastor and has enabled the church to offer worship services every Sunday.



Sandy Point Missionary Baptist Church Windsor



Sandy Point Missionary Baptist Church was officially formed in 1885 but the actual church structure is much older. The framework of the church was constructed as a house of worship in 1776 and uses pegs instead of nails to hold the frame together. In 1872 the buildings and grounds of the church were sold to the black members of the congregation to have as their place of worship. Until this point, both blacks and whites worshiped together in the church. The current church structure is bricked over the original wooden shell. Early ministers of importance were Reverend Bryant Lee, the first pastor, and Reverends Luke J.P. Law, and J.W. Law.

With a membership of 235, the church places an emphasis on helping the surrounding community as well as its members through several programs. Donations to Hospice, Shaw University, Foreign Missions and rest homes reflect this goal. Care for the sick and needy is of major importance.

Speller's Chapel Church of Christ Windsor

Speller's Chapel was formed in 1873 on Spellers Ferry Road in response to the needs of its community. The current church building, on Outlaw Farm Road, has a brick facade with a fellowship hall and serves the needs of its 146-member congregation.

Founding ministers and members of the church were: Elders Henry Speller, Joshua War, Claude Winston, W.D. Keyes, General Vice Bishop John Armstrong, Lucy Hoggard, William Bazemore, Mary C. Winborne, James R. Speller, and Maggie Speller. There have been many members who have contributed to the success of the church over the years but a few, such as Mrs. Otelia Speller, secretary for 45 years and Mrs. Zetella Watson, musician for 41 years, who worked tirelessly to support their church.



The church has a community emphasis that encourages its members to help the sick, give to civic organizations, and help people in need. As a result of this emphasis, the congregation regularly donates funds to sick members of the community and provides quarterly support to those who are sick indefinitely.

Weeping Mary Baptist Church Lewiston



Established in 1889, Weeping Mary Church has produced many members who have made significant contributions, representing the first African-Americans to serve the local community politically, educationally, and in local government. The church regularly provides financial assistance to senior citizens in the local area and annual contributions are given to Bertie High School's Project Graduation and Shaw University for the benefit of local students.

Believed to be one of the oldest African-American churches in Lewiston, West Early, Jonie Thompson, A.W. Lamb, P.G. Welch, and W.D. Lassiter have served the congregation as ministers. Founding members of the congregation include Willis Williams, Perry Watson, Martha T. Watson, Stockey Thompson, Ella Thompson, Grant Watson, Mattie Watson, Paul L. Williams, Mittie Williams, Willis (Gus) Thompson, Rosa Thompson, Octavious Williams, Pattie Williams and Alex Watson.

The current church building of Weeping Mary is brick with a sanctuary, fellowship hall and multi-purpose rooms. This brick facade replaced an older wooden structure.

Woodville Plains Missionary Baptist Church Lewiston-Woodville



The original founding date of Woodville Plains church is not known but is thought to be one of the oldest in the area. It was first established in Woodville and later moved to its present location in Lewiston. The first pastor of the church was Reverend Brinkley.

The existing building is brick but an earlier structure on the site was remodeled in 1921. Later, under the pastorate of Reverend Berkley P. Heckstall, pastor emeritus, the church was bricked into its current appearance. Some of the early deacons of the church were Madison Lee, Lee A. Clark, Thomas Watson,

Madison Horton, Jake Sharpe, and Eugene Howell.

The church's community based goals revolve around the need to minister to the lost and hopeless and to lead them to maturity within the church.

"A place where everybody can come and worship the Lord. A place where everybody is somebody and God is all."

Wynn's Grove Baptist Church Colerain



Wynn's Grove Church was founded in 1875 and currently serves a congregation of 200 members. The present structure is brick but an earlier wooden structure stood on the site. An old cemetery is located within the churchyard.

Reverends Preston Charlie Sharp and Armstead Cooper are credited as being part of the group that formed the church as well as Deacon Joe Morris, John Outlaw, and Jimmy Holley. Some of the most prominent members of the congregation were Reverends J.P. Law, H.H. Miller, John Skinner, and Henry Smith.

As part of its contributions to local community development, Wynn's Grove donates to the Red Cross, Cancer funds, and to the local fire and rescue squads.

Zion Bethlehem Baptist Church Windsor

Zion Bethlehem was formed shortly after the Civil War in 1865 by a congregation formed from a group who met in the home of Mrs. Lucy Watson and other homes in the community. This group first met in a building off King Street and had Reverend Zion H. Berry as their pastor.

In 1897 Reverend C.M. Cartwright became pastor of the church and land for the first church building was purchased. In 1902, trustees Emanuel Taylor, Turner Bond, and Samuel Duers purchased the land from John B. and Sallie B. Gilliam. In 1911, the first church was constructed on this site which was located on Pitt and Queen streets. In 1925, this building was destroyed by fire. During the following years, the congregation stayed together and worshipped in various locations and in the homes of members.

Under the pastorship of Reverend John P. Law, another site was purchased in 1943 and another church constructed. Unfortunately, this church structure was also destroyed by fire. The congregation continued to meet, using various buildings around the community to hold services, including St. Elmo Baptist Church and the Old Bertie Academy School. The church was again rebuilt in 1947 at its current location on Ghent Street and later remodeled.

With a membership of 100, Zion Bethlehem has proven that it is "the friendly church with a small membership -- but -- with a big heart." Community involvement of the church includes the organization of a youth recreational basketball league consisting of churches throughout the country. Many of the members of the congregation have worked within the community to create a greater unity and well being for all involved.



Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church Colerain

Zion Hill Church is currently home to a growing congregation of 350. In order to accommodate the needs of its congregation, a new church building has recently been completed. A cornerstone on the new church states that the stately older building, which is still standing in the shadow of the new, was first renovated in 1923, bricked in 1953, remodeled in 1977, and that the new church was built in 1995.

Zion Hill was founded in 1870 with Reverend Emmanuel Reynolds serving as the first pastor. The first Trustees were W.C. Watford, Walter M. Davison and Z.R. Chance. Other important members were Thomas Jenkins, Arnold Burke, and Clinton Freeman. The church has been home to many excellent ministers: Reverends Moses Norma, Zackie White, A.V. Askew, George Griffin, M.M. Newsome, Joshua Nimmo, W.L. Miller, C.H. Riddick, Dr. and C.C. Lawrence all worked to create an atmosphere of spirituality and enlightenment. Nathaniel J.



Thompson currently serves as the pastor for this active church.

The church constantly works to improve the lives of its members as well as those of the inhabitants of the surrounding community. Future plans for activities to benefit the community include the development of a daycare, senior care, a soup kitchen, and many cultural and Christian social activities. The church provides contributions to local fire and rescue squads as well as the Red Cross and Project Graduation at Bertie High School.

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